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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1806
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RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 6863
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 5449
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAWJL/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 BANGKOK 002045

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, NSC FOR WALTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/17/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#) [BM](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: SENATOR WEBB FOCUSES ON BURMA WITH PM AND FM;
AMBASSADOR RAISES VIKTOR BOUT CASE

REF: BANGKOK 1998

BANGKOK 00002045 001.2 OF 005

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ERIC G. JOHN, REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary. During the course of August 17 meetings with Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and Foreign Minister Kasit Pirmoya, Senator Jim Webb (D-VA) shared the details of his recent visit to Burma and outlined his thoughts on breaking the impasse with the regime. Both Kasit and Vejjajiva noted Thailand's commitment to keeping pressure on Burma, as well as working with fellow ASEAN members to try and secure Aung San Suu Kyi's release. Foreign Minister Kasit Pirmoya advocated a compromise between the regime, Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy that would allow Burma to move forward in developing a multi-party political system.

Senator Webb responded to questions about the efficacy of sanctions in both meetings, and told FM Kasit that additional Chinese pressure on the regime would prove more useful than any new sanctions.

12. (C) In both meetings, Webb vowed to use his upcoming appointments with Cambodian and Vietnamese leaders to push for more responsible action by ASEAN on Burma. In the meeting with PM Abhisit, he praised Thailand's own activism on Burma within ASEAN, and Abhisit noted that he hoped to generate a collective ASEAN statement calling for ASSK's release. PM Abhisit also discussed plans for a possible U.S.-ASEAN Summit. The Ambassador underscored the importance of ensuring Russian arms trafficker Viktor Bout is not released on bail and asked the Prime Minister to issue a statement refuting the lower court's decision to deny the extradition. End Summary.

SUCCESSFUL ENGAGEMENT IN BURMA

13. (C) Senator Webb and the Ambassador called on Foreign Minister Kasit Pirmoya August 17. Senator Webb reviewed his August 14 - 16 visit to Burma and discussed his objectives for the trip. First, the Senator had sought the release of

Amcit John Yettaw on humanitarian grounds. Secondly, he had hoped to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) in order to discuss prospects for full participation in the 2010 election. Finally, he wanted to convince the Burmese regime that lifting ASSK's house arrest would enhance the legitimacy of the 2010 elections. Senator Webb said that he attempted to appeal to the regime's self-interest in his meetings with Burmese leaders by impressing upon them that the international community would judge the regime by how it treated ASSK. While the Burmese leadership had remained silent on lifting the house arrest for ASSK, at least the regime had not expressly rejected the proposal.

NLD PARTICIPATION IN 2010 ELECTIONS?

¶4. (C) Senator Webb noted that in separate meetings with members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and ASSK, he had asked what conditions would need to be in place in order to trigger their participation in planned 2010 Burmese elections. The NLD had demurred while ASSK told the Senator that she would not answer the question on her own, characterizing it as an NLD party decision.

¶5. (C) FM Kasit sought to separate the NLD's participation in the election from ASSK's. The Foreign Minister envisioned a compromise in which ASSK and other political prisoners were released. Under such a scenario, ASSK would then be allowed to speak and campaign publicly for the NLD, vote in the election, but would not be qualified to run for Prime Minister. The NLD must be given the opportunity to participate in the election, Kasit said. By following through on this proposal, Burma would be given the chance to

BANGKOK 00002045 002.2 OF 005

gradually adapt to democracy and phase out the military junta.

¶6. (C) Senator Webb agreed with the notion that the NLD must be given the chance to participate in the election, as well as the need for the party to seize such an opportunity. Senator Webb stated that the NLD had been inflexible to this point, but would need to accept what was possible and not hold on to unrealistic expectations. Searching for a compromise solution would be the best way to test the regime's intentions, the Senator said. While an election under the current constitution would keep the military regime in power, at least the political environment would be multi-party, more than could be said for Vietnam and China.

¶7. (C) FM Kasit noted that both sides would need to compromise in order for Burma to progress. Any hard-line policy that compelled the military regime to give up power without first providing for immunity from future prosecution would surely fail. The Ambassador suggested to the Foreign Minister that the Thai government seek to continue these discussions with Embassy Bangkok as the USG conducted a review of its Burma policy. Kasit agreed to do so.

URGING ASEAN ACTION ON BURMA

¶8. (C) Turning to ASEAN, FM Kasit told Senator Webb that he had sent a circular to his ASEAN colleagues requesting a collective appeal to the Burmese regime to grant amnesty to ASSK. Only four other ASEAN nations agreed with Thailand -- Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore -- while the remaining ASEAN nations resisted pushing the regime. (Note: In an end-of-day meeting, the PM stated that only Laos was opposed to such a statement. See paragraph 21. End Note.)

¶9. (C) On the subject of Senator Webb's upcoming August 18 meeting with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, Kasit asked the Senator to press the Cambodian leader to act responsibly with regard to Burma. Hun Sen needed to work together with

Thailand and the U.S. rather than resorting to a Cold War obstructionist mentality, the Foreign Minister said. Kasit also asked the Senator to raise Burma with Vietnamese leaders. Vietnam would need to begin to act constructively on this issue, especially as it prepares to assume the ASEAN Chairmanship next year. Vietnam and other Southeast Asian nations that were reluctant to press Burma also needed to understand that ASEAN could not continue to take the path of least resistance, a course of action that would mean ASEAN would not have a future.

PUSHING CHINA FOR ACTION MORE EFFECTIVE THAN SANCTIONS

¶10. (C) FM Kasit expressed his hope that the ASSK verdict would not prompt further U.S. sanctions. Senator Webb said he doubted there were areas where more sanctions could be imposed. Instead, he thought it would be more effective to press China to act more responsibly towards Burma. Sanctions by the U.S. and the European Union had given China the opportunity to increase its economic presence in Burma and had resulted in greater Chinese political influence there. Western sanctions had also cut Burma off from contact with diverse viewpoints and cultures, much to the detriment of the society and the people. Senator Webb told Kasit that he saw a similar dynamic play out during his time working on Vietnam issues. Western economic engagement there had benefited the Vietnamese people and exposed them to varying ways of thinking.

¶11. (C) FM Kasit recommended that Thailand and the U.S. work together to push China to pressure the junta to release

BANGKOK 00002045 003.2 OF 005

political prisoners and hold inclusive elections. Senator Webb agreed with Kasit and noted that China needed to accept the responsibility that comes with ambitions of world leadership.

NEXT STEPS

¶12. (C) FM Kasit noted that the ASEAN Foreign Ministers supported his planned visit Burma. He mentioned he would meet with the Burmese Ambassador to Thailand later in the evening to secure such a visit. Kasit added that he would also participate in a meeting with Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban, Thai military leaders, and a limited number of other Ministers later that day to review Thai policy on Burma.

¶13. (C) At the close of the meeting, FM Kasit asked Senator Webb how he would proceed upon his return to Washington. Senator Webb said that he had discussed his Burma trip with Secretary Clinton on August 16 and added that he looked forward to further consultations with the Secretary in Washington.

ABHISIT ON POLITICS AND THE ECONOMY

¶14. (C) During a late afternoon August 17 meeting with Senator Webb and the Ambassador, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva commented on the strength of U.S.-Thai relations before noting his country's economic struggles. He emphasized his dedication to getting Thailand back on solid economic footing, a job that was currently complicated by political instability. Abhisit expressed optimism that his commitment to the political reconciliation process would payoff in the long-run.

WEBB RECAPS FOR ABHISIT

¶15. (C) Turning to Burma, Senator Webb contrasted his impressions of his recently completed visit there with a trip

he took to Vietnam in 1991. In many ways Rangoon was further along developmentally speaking than Saigon was in 1991. With respect to Vietnam, it was obvious that the end of the sanctions regime there had initiated a sea change in how the Vietnamese viewed the world and their place in it.

¶16. (C) In response to PM Abhisit's question about his meeting with ASSK, Webb reiterated the readout he previewed earlier for FM Kasit, noting that neither ASSK nor the party seemed ready to commit to elections. If pressed to hazard a guess, Webb said that he thought that ASSK would probably not participate. On the subject of sanctions, Webb noted that they have both a political and an economic impact. Webb reported that when he shared his thoughts on sanctions with ASSK, she said -- perhaps factoring in the likelihood of unfriendly eavesdroppers -- that she did not necessarily oppose all sanctions.

¶17. (C) Prime Minister Abhisit expressed his concern that illegitimate elections would reverse several years of gradual progress with the regime, representing a major setback. Abhisit mirrored Kasit's concerns about the NLD's unrealistic expectations moving forward, and wondered aloud how minorities would respond to any potential reconciliation efforts.

¶18. (C) As for the regime itself, Webb reported that he had met with all six top leaders and impressed upon them the importance of holding legitimate elections. Furthermore, Webb had warned them that the regime would be judged by the international community by how it treated ASSK. He advised

BANGKOK 00002045 004.2 OF 005

them to take a credible step like releasing ASSK in order to rehabilitate Burma's image internationally. By releasing her and bringing in a neutral third party such as Thailand to referee reconciliation efforts, the regime would have a workable formula in place to move the country in the right direction.

NEXT STEPS

¶19. (C) On the subject of the upcoming Burmese elections, Abhisit asked Senator Webb what he thought would happen if ASSK and the NLD were invited to participate in upcoming elections but the rules stayed the same. Emphasizing that he could only speak for himself personally, Webb said he thought it would hinge largely on the regime's ability to shape outside impressions of the process. Webb emphasized that finding ways to secure gradual "victories" in this process would be key, and lay the foundation for a multi-party system. After all, Webb noted, one should not forget that Vietnam and China still do not have multi-party electoral systems.

¶20. (C) Noting that his own planned trip to Burma had been cancelled in anticipation of the ASSK verdict, PM Abhisit mentioned that FM Kasit would be traveling to Burma soon. He said Kasit would be charged with sounding out the regime and would seek an appointment with ASSK. Given the fact that the UN Secretary General had been denied an audience with ASSK, he could not predict whether the request would be granted.

¶21. (C) On the subject of ASEAN's engagement on Burma, PM Abhisit pointed out that Thailand had secured an ASEAN collective statement on the ASSK verdict. He added that Thailand was currently working on issuing an ASEAN statement requesting ASSK's amnesty, but noted that one holdout remained: Laos. He vowed to work to convince Laos to sign off on the statement, adding that Vietnam and Cambodia had eventually come around after some initial reluctance. Senator Webb promised he would make Burma a focal point of his upcoming trips to Cambodia and Vietnam.

U.S.-ASEAN SUMMIT

¶22. (C) Turning to his recent trip to the Philippines, PM Abhisit noted that President Arroyo was delighted with the results of her recent visit to Washington, and had expressed enthusiasm to Abhisit for a U.S.-ASEAN Summit either in Manila or the U.S. PM Abhisit told Senator Webb and the Ambassador that while he appreciated President Arroyo's enthusiasm, he had advised her that it might be more realistic to build such a Summit on to the margins of the upcoming APEC meeting in Singapore. When Abhisit related Arroyo's concerns that events in Burma might preclude U.S. involvement in such a meeting, the Ambassador assured him that Secretary Clinton had made it very clear to FM Kasit in Phuket last month that she wants to continue to deepen engagement with ASEAN.

VIKTOR BOUT

¶23. (C) Turning to a Thai criminal court's recent decision to deny the U.S. request to extradite notorious arms trafficker Viktor Bout, the Ambassador expressed disappointment with the verdict and the flawed legal analysis used in the judgment. The Ambassador asked PM Abhisit to work to ensure Viktor Bout is denied bail, pointing out that he is a profound flight risk. The Ambassador further called upon the Royal Thai Government to issue a statement disagreeing with the lower court's decision and refuting the court's characterization of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) as a

BANGKOK 00002045 005.2 OF 005

political organization, noting that such statements are common place in the U.S. system. The Ambassador further underscored the fact that FARC is a terrorist organization, before noting the impact such a damaging legal precedent could have in a country waging its own battle with insurgents.

¶24. (C) Prime Minister Abhisit took the Ambassador's points and said that he too had been surprised and disappointed with the decision. He vowed to continue to direct the Office of the Attorney General's office to work to ensure that Bout is denied bail, and noted that he was aware of Attorney General Holder's August 17 discussion with the Thai AG. Furthermore, he promised his administration would work hard with U.S. authorities to overturn the verdict. He asked the Ambassador for any and all facts that might help to turn the case around on appeal and vowed that his administration would continue to collaborate to the full extent possible. Although courts in Thailand are independent, Abhisit promised to do everything he could to help with the case.

¶25. (U) Senator Webb did not clear this cable.
JOHN